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HEADLINE: Speaker's Spot On Web Site Causes Sparks; Web Posting Raises Some Eyebrows

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BODY:

House Speaker Marty Stephens' use of the Legislature's nonpartisan Web site to promote his new **education** funding proposal has raised some eyebrows.

The APPLE (**Action Plan for Public Lands and Education**) Initiative is an ambitious strategy calling for Western state leaders to seek **education** funding from the federal government -- money they insist they lose through federal public land policies.

Stephens figures Utah -- where nearly 75 percent of the land is owned by the federal or state government -- could collect \$ 836 million in one-time money and \$ 292 million a year.

The proposal does not require legislative approval, and its appearance on the Legislature's Web site raised questions of partisanship. Stephens, who has made no secret of his ambition to be governor, plans to push the issue in Washington himself.

"Everyone wants to get a copy of this," said Stephens, a Republican from Farr West. His 61-slide presentation backing up those numbers has been on the state's Web site since Aug. 6.

Rather than copy each graphic, Stephens says, legislative research staff suggested putting the proposal on the Web site usually reserved for factual information such as agendas, minutes, texts of bills and vote records.

Stephens announced the proposal early in July, pitched the idea to leaders at the Council of State Governments-West's meeting in Lake Tahoe, Nev., later that month and persuaded members of the state Legislative Management Committee to sign off last week.

But House Minority Leader Ralph Becker, D-Salt Lake City, has asked legislative researchers to take the presentation off the Web site. Becker, who supports Stephens' idea, nevertheless questions whether posting the slide presentation on the state Web site is appropriate.

"It surprised me to see it there," he said. "The Web site is supposed to be nonpartisan, to give people information about the Legislature, their actions, ways to contact legislators.

"I'm not aware of any time in the past when we have put the proposals of any

legislator -- no matter how wonderful they may be -- on the Web site. There are plenty of initiatives that I and other legislators have that we think are meritorious and should be on the Web site."

Becker says he asked Legislative Research Director Mike Christensen to remove Stephens' proposal from the Web site weeks ago.

Christensen did not return two phone calls Wednesday seeking comment.

His office mission statement says staff are to provide "objective, accurate, concise and timely information that facilitates informed decision making and effective policy development by the legislative branch."

The speaker, who says he does not know who is in charge of the state's Web site or whether there are policies for what is placed on the site, insists his proposal is nonpartisan. Still, the only lawmakers listed as contacts at the end of the slide show are Republicans -- although the Legislative Management Committee, including Becker, agreed to a resolution supporting the idea.

Stephens says other legislators are free to ask state staff to post their initiatives on the Web site.

"I don't know of anyone who has ever come up with an initiative like this before," Stephens said. "This was approved unanimously by legislative research. It's not to advertise some legislator or something. "